

R U L E S

TO BE OBSERVED

IN THE

THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY,

EDINBURGH;

INSTITUTED FOR THE

PURPOSE OF MUTUAL EDIFICATION,

BY A

FREE INQUIRY INTO THE

DOCTRINES OF DIVINE REVELATION.

*To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to
this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

ISAIAH, VIII. 20.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY.

M,DCC,XC.

R U L E S, &c.

P R E A M B L E.

THE Members who first constituted this Religious Society, some time in July 1789, finding its original intent frustrated by a number of New Members, who, becoming a majority, voted away the Rules upon which it was originally constituted, which they themselves had subscribed, and one of which provided, that those Rules were to be amended by unanimous consent only;—they therefore did, on Thursday evening the 4th of February 1790, declare their dissent from that majority; and, with the concurrence of some New Members, have agreed to the following Rules, for promoting the original intent of the Society, and preventing a similar confusion in future.

I. *With respect to the Members.*

1. When any Person applies to become a Member, he shall have a copy of these Rules given him, for which he shall pay 3 d. If, after he has had them a week, he still desires to be admitted a Member, he shall be asked, If he believes that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain a revelation from God? If a love of truth, and a desire to receive and communicate the same, be his motive for becoming a member? And, If he has considered the Rules of the Society, agrees with, and is resolved to observe them? If he answers these questions in the affirmative, and if there be no objection to his moral character, and none of the Members oppose his admission, he shall be admitted a Member, if the number of Members be not full before. See also Article 2. of head V.

2. If any Member transgresses the Rules, he shall only be admonished by the President, unless the transgression be very great, or the admonition be disregarded: But, in any of these cases, the President shall have

a discretionary power to nominate a fine, not less than Two-pence, nor more than One Shilling; which shall be paid at the dismissal of the meeting, or the first opportunity thereafter. If any Member be troublesome, and neither admonitions nor fines seem to reform him, any Member may make a motion for his exclusion, which, if agreed to by three-fourths of the Society, he shall be excluded.

3. The number of Members shall not exceed 40, unless three-fourths of the Members think it expedient to increase the number of Members, and diminish the number of Visitors.

4. While the number of Members do not exceed 40, every Member, when admitted, shall receive two tickets, one for himself, and one for an acquaintance; on both which he shall write his own name; as also, the word *Member* on his own, and *Visitor* on the other.

5. Visitors shall be subject to the Rules of Behaviour, and liable to exclusion for transgression, the same as the Members are.

Only,

Only, the Members shall retain their tickets, and Visitors shall deliver theirs to the Door-keeper as they go in, who shall deliver them to the Clerk after Nine o'clock; from whom the Members will receive them at the dismissal of the Society. Any Member not present at dismissal, may have his ticket from the Clerk between and the next meeting.

6. Every Member, on being admitted into the Society, shall pay not less than Sixpence, and thereafter his proportion of the expences which shall be incurred, quarterly; but no person shall be liable for expences incurred after he has left the Society, which he may do when he pleases.

7. Four weeks absence of a member after the quarter day, without payment of his proportion of expences, or a proper excuse made for such neglect, shall be considered as a desertion of the Society, and another Member may then be received to supply the vacancy.

II. *Of Behaviour and Speaking in the Society.*

1. Every Person present must behave with that sobriety which becomes a Society met for prayer, and mutual edification.

2. None are to whisper, or speak to one another, so as to interrupt others from hearing the Speaker; nor may any stand upon the seats, but must interrupt the view and hearing of others as little as possible. And none but the President may interrupt a Speaker.

3. Every Member or Visitor may speak his mind freely upon any subject under consideration, and may use every scriptural and rational argument to support his own opinion, or oppose what is contrary thereto; but must observe the rules as to the time, order, and manner of speaking.

4. No person shall speak more than ten minutes at once, except the first speaker, who shall be allowed fifteen minutes, either at once or twice, as he shall think proper.

5. No person shall speak immediately after another, on the same side of a question, when there is a difference of opinion; nor may any one speak twice (except the first, as above,) till leave be intimated by the President. After one minute's silence, the President shall intimate leave to any former speaker, opposite to the last, to speak again: And, if no reply be made in another minute, he shall then intimate leave for any person to speak on any side he pleases.

6. No person shall make any improper reflections on another for what he may say, nor apply unchristian or illiberal epithets to him, or his party.

7. Every person may deliver his sentiments in what manner he pleases, either *extempore*, from *memory*, or in *writing*.

III. *Of Texts, Subjects, or Questions.*

1. Any Member or Person contributing to the support of this Institution, shall have a right to propose any text of Scripture,
subject

subject contained therein, or question taken therefrom, for the consideration of the Society ; and the texts, subjects, or questions, being presented, shall be spoken to in the same order in which they are given in, as far as shall be consistent with the equality provided for in the following Articles.

2. Two or more questions shall not be brought forward in immediate succession by persons of one opinion, unless by consent of the opposite, if there be any in opposition, or for the sake of connection ; in which cases, the opposite side shall be allowed as many in immediate succession.

3. Persons of every particular opinion, whether one or more, shall have equal privilege in bringing forward questions, so that those who are most numerous shall have no advantage, in that respect, above one or two of a different opinion.

4. When any subject has been spoken to one night, if one or two Members desire it to be continued, it shall be continued

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another night. It shall require a majority of votes to continue it a third night, and three fourths to continue it a fourth, beyond which it shall not go but by unanimous consent. None are to vote but Members ; and no votes to be taken on the doctrines.

5. When only one or two are for the question continued, the President shall intimate what the next question is ; that, in case the present should afford little or no more speaking, the Society may know what will be the subject for the next night. And next night the President shall read or repeat the question to be continued. Then, if no person speaks to it in five minutes, he shall propose the next. Or, if, after one or two have spoken, none shall speak again in other five minutes, the President shall then again propose the next Question ; he having given the several intimations mentioned in the Third Article of the Second Head.

6. The manner of presenting Questions shall be by a line signed by the person ; which line shall be delivered to the President before the dismissal of the meeting.

IV.

IV. *Of Presidents.*

1. Every Member shall have a right to be President in his turn, and in succession to one another, as their names stand in the list; only, such as do not choose to be President may decline; in which case, and in case of absence, the next in succession, who inclines, shall supply his place. None shall substitute another, nor be President after it is past his turn, till it be his turn again, according to the order of the list.

2. It shall belong to the President to open the meeting with prayer; read or repeat the text, subject, or state of the question; cause the rules to be observed; put an end to the speaking at the time agreed to by the Society; give a short state of the arguments as far as he can; deliver his own opinion, and conclude with prayer and praise. He shall then take the opinion of the Members as to the continuance of the question, which shall be dismissed or continued as directed by the 4th Article of Head II.

3. If the President incline to speak, as above, he must confine himself to 10 or 15 minutes ; and, as the meeting should be dismissed before 10 o'clock, he shall put a stop to the speaking of others, at half past nine or sooner, if allowing another Speaker would go beyond that time. If there be a difference of opinion, he shall put a stop to the speaking a little sooner or later, that the number of Speakers on the different sides may be equal upon the whole, and the meeting dismissed by 10 o'clock.

V. *Of a Committee.*

1. There shall be a Committee chosen quarterly from the Society, to consist of the Clerk and six other Members, more or less, to be made up, as equally as possible, of persons of the different opinions that may obtain in the Society.

2. It shall belong to this Committee to receive applications from persons who wish to be Members, examine them, and report their opinion to the Society. Upon which the person or persons shall be publicly

licly received by the President, if approved by the Society, and there be room for admission. If there be any opposition, the concurrence of three fourths of the Society shall be required for his or their admission.

3. It shall also belong to the Committee to bring forward the questions given in to the President, in an orderly and equitable manner, and supply questions when order or equality may require.

4. Any other business belonging to the Society, for which the Committee is competent, may be managed by them. And when they cannot determine, or agree about, any matter, they shall apply to the Society for instructions.

VI. *Of the Clerk, Expences, &c.*

1. The Clerk, who may also be Treasurer, shall be chosen by the Society yearly, or oftener, as the Society and he shall find convenient.

2. The Clerk shall keep a regular account of the expences incurred by the Society ;

ciety ; for the payment of which the Society shall provide, by quarterly collections, and the entry of new Members.

3. The Society shall meet every Thursday evening, or any other evening they may hereafter find convenient, at half an hour past Seven, or at Eight o'clock, as shall be most convenient for the Members in general, to consider any subject that may be proposed for consideration.

4. These rules shall be amended only by unanimous consent ; except the last, which relates to the time of meeting, and the third Article of the First Head, which relates to the number of Members, which may be altered by three fourths of the Society agreeing to the alteration. Additional rules, if found expedient, may also be made, if agreed to by three fourths of the Society : But no alterations or additions shall be made by any majority whatever, that shall in any respect alter or injure the rest of the rules, which are hereby declared to be permanent.

N. B.

N. B. A copy of these printed Rules shall be prefixed to the book in which the Members shall insert their names.

